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REVISING AND RE-EDITING A GUIDE FOR COMPARATIVE AND GENERAL LITERATURE.

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THIS REPORT DESCRIBED THE EDITORIAL WORK UNDERTAKEN TO BRING TO A PUBLISHABLE STATE A COOPERATIVE, CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF STUDIES ESSENTIAL TO THE BROAD STUDY OF LITERATURE AND ITS RELATIONSHIPS. THIS BIBLIOGRAPHY WAS STARTED ABOUT 1940 AND HAD ENGAGED THE EFFORTS OF MORE THAN 100 SCHOLARS AND EDITORS. SUPPORT WAS RECEIVED FROM THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION, THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES, THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT BECAME OBSOLETE AFTER WORK WAS STOPPED IN 1952 DUE TO INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO MEET HIGHER-THAN-EXPECTED PUBLISHING COSTS. CURRENT RENOVATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT REQUIRED THE CONSULTATION OF MORE THAN 20,000 ADDITIONAL BOOKS AND PERIODICALS. ABOUT 3,000 ENTRIES WERE ELIMINATED AS OBSOLETE, AND AROUND 5,000 ENTRIES, MADE AVAILABLE BY RECENT SCHOLARSHIP, WERE INCORPORATED. MANY OF THE EARLIER ANNOTATIONS WITH SUBSIDIARY REFERENCES WERE REVISED. THE COMPLETED MANUSCRIPT WAS BEING READIED FOR PRINTING AT THE TIME OF REPORTING. THE INVESTIGATOR ANTICIPATED THAT THE GUIDE WOULD BECOME AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL IN RESEARCH AND WOULD POINT THE WAY TOWARD NEW RESEARCH IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY AREAS. (JH)

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Project S-144(OE-5110-Off)

Revising and Re-editing a Guide for Comparative and General Literature

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REVISING AND RE-EDITING A GUIDE FOR COMPARATIVE AND GENERAL LITERATURE

Project No. S-144(OE-5110-Off)
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Charlton Laird

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INTRODUCTION

Bibliographical and reference materials for the broad study of literature and its relationships with other areas have long been inadequate, lacking in coverage or competence or both. Beginning about 1940, the late Dr. Arthur E. Christy, consecutively of Columbia University and the University of Illinois, proposed a co-operative critical bibliography to fill some of these needs. His plans, later somewhat revised, were to result in a large volume, of approximately seven hundred pages with a format roughly 10" x 7", to include the following six sections: (1) general works for comparative study involving literature; (2) all significant translations into English of all works of whatever provenance having literatary importance; (3) studies comparative by nature, for example, folklore; (4) studies of the relationships between literature and other subjects, for example, the relationships between literature and language; (5) the influence from abroad upon British literature; (6) the influence from abroad upon American literature and the introduction of the cultural base of life in the United States. The American Council of Learned Societies, the American Library Association, and the National Council of the Teachers of English Jointly assumed direction of the work; of these, all but the latter have since withdrawn. The Rockefeller Foundation provided $25,000 to aid in the preparation of the manuscript; the ALA assumed the right and obligation to publish, and has provided some funds, $5,000 in one lump and smaller sums for various purposes at other times. Christy was named general editor, and staff of more than a hundred scholars was recruited to prepare critical bibliographies and to edit these into a completed manuscript, with brief introductions and elaborate index.

The work progressed rapidly under Christy's aegis, but his death in 1945 brought it to a halt. Dr. Charlton Laird, a contributor to the bibliography, assumed the editorship, recruited further contributors, and completed a draft of the proposed volume, except for front matter and index, in the autumn of 1952. By this time it had become apparent that the volume Christy had proposed could not be comprised within the limits set for it, and printing costs had so risen that ALA found itself unable to publish, even if the manuscript were to be cut drastically, which everyone agreed would be disastrous. Further funds were sought, but they did not readily appear.

By the late 1950's, the NCTE, with a revitalized administration and a greatly enlarged membership, agreed to assume responsibility for publication, and the book was reorganized. The translations section was put under the joint editorship of Dr. George E. Parks of Queens College, former associate editor, and Dr. Ruth Z. Temple of Brooklyn College, who had done much of the editing of the translations section. This portion of the original manuscript is now being revised and printed ~~under the title~~ by a private publisher in ~~two~~ five volumes. Meanwhile, Laird endeavored to bring the remainder of the manuscript down to date and to provide for some additions and other revisions. This proved to be a slow process; the original subventions had all been spent, and in the ten to twenty years which had elapsed since the original bibliographies had been prepared, many of the contributors had died, more had retired or were in ill health, and still more had assumed responsibilities which precluded their reviving interest in a project which they had long ago abandoned. The editor found that he had to recruit new staff and in some instances train replacements for key positions. With a skeleton staff rebuilt and much of the required research done, the editor under date of March, 1964, relying upon Public Law 531, 83rd, Congress, requested $7488.00 to aid in the revising and re-editing. The funds were made available under a terminal date of August 31, 1965; this contract was subsequently extended for one year. Some additional funds were obtained; the University of Nevada, through the Desert Research Institute provided $2500 to import an Oriental scholar to help with Oriental materials. It also provided unbudgeted aid in the form of stationery, secretarial help, office space and materials, which would have run well over $1,000. The University of California, Idaho State University, and others provided similar help in lesser sums.

METHODS

No new methods were needed. All contributors and editors were highly trained scholars who were familiar with bibliographical methods in their fields, and special methods in editing had already been worked out in detail during the preparation of the draft completed in 1952. Bibliographies were assigned to specialists, mainly for revision and updating, but in a few instances, where original plans had been revised, entirely new bibliographies were prepared. All bibliographies were edited by section editors, who sent their

manuscripts to the general editor, who supervised final editing, typing, checking, and indexing, and is preparing introductory material.

RESULTS

In the main the project was completed, although neither time nor money sufficed for a finished manuscript. No accurate statistics are available, and obtaining them would be expensive, and of little consequence, but the results can be said to be highly satisfactory and generally apparent. A rough guess might suggest that the work is about 95 per cent complete; the organization that has been built up is quite capable of completing the manuscript, and subsidiary funds have been assured by NCTE, the University of Nevada, and other sources. Prospectuses are now being prepared, and there is every reason to believe that as soon as publishing arrangements are complete a finished manuscript will be ready for the printer.

Some rough statistics may be of interest. The draft of 1952, insofar as it is embodied in the present manuscript, included something more than 13,000 entries, perhaps half of them annotated. Various aspects of the revision have required consulting more than 20,000 additional books and periodicals; this research has made possible eliminating perhaps 3000 entries as obsolete, while incorporating perhaps 5000 entries made possible by recent scholarship, and revising many of the earlier annotations with subsidiary references. Instructions to the editors were to keep the manuscript from growing appreciably in bulk, and in general this has been done, but most entries have been somewhat revised and all bibliographies have been strengthened. The new manuscript is perhaps 5 per cent greater than the old one, certainly not more than 10 per cent greater; accurate figures will not be possible until the editing is complete, and would be possible then only with a character count, which would serve little useful purpose in the editing.

Looked at in larger sections, the book appears as follows. All major sections have been re-edited and updated. About half the book has been finally edited, typed, and is in the hands of a trained checker and an indexer. More than half the remaining copy has been mainly edited and typed, but there are scattering bibliographies which have been delayed and are now being completed, or have been completed and are now being

some few
typed; for which the research has been completed are being re-edited. They are promised within the next few months.

Meanwhile, the editor is in close association with Dr. James Squire, Executive Secretary of NCTE, which is actively preparing for the publication of the manuscript.

DISCUSSION

The editors are generally pleased with the results. When the manuscript was evaluated in 1953 as part of an effort to raise more money, the examining committee were unanimous in asserting that the whole represented a remarkable scholarly achievement, that the book should be a standard work of great value for both reference and research, and that it should be revised and published at the earliest possible date. That date has long been postponed, but the revision has greatly strengthened the manuscript, and the need for the volume is even greater now than it was in 1953. The subvention made available through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has provided the additional assistance to bring to publishable state a work of first importance for the well-being of the nation and of international relationships. This observation must be expressed as an opinion, but it is an opinion concurred in by every competent person who has seen any large portion of the manuscript, and one from which there can be little if any informed dissent.

The manuscript has its limitation; all works do, and a work that ranges as widely as does this one, and a work furthermore that is in part a pioneer study, has peculiar and inevitable weaknesses. All great reference works suffer in at least one of two ways: they reflect the impossibility of one man's commanding many areas of learning and adequately representing many points of view, or they reflect the incompatibility of many collaborators. The Guide is a co-operative work; it is inevitably uneven, and this in spite of a policy on the part of the editors of revising or amplifying copy rather boldly.

On the other hand, the manuscript has great virtues. It represents the distilled experience of dozens of experts, many of them leaders in their fields. Every bibliography presented is in at least some ways superior to anything now available. Many of the bibliographies are pioneer works; not

only has no such bibliography been well done, none has been seriously attempted. This last is notably true of cross-disciplinary studies; no bibliography had previously been seriously attempted concerning the relationships between literature and language, literature and education, literature and the press, literature and law, and many more. Furthermore, these areas themselves have been but little studied, and thus the Guide will have as a secondary advantage pointing the way to hundreds of comparative studies which should be undertaken. Scholar after scholar who has worked on such a bibliography has been amazed at the potential research subjects which the Guide has revealed, even in his own area.

Thus the Guide should become an indispensable tool in research and a seminal study directing new research.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATION, RECOMMENDATIONS

No "conclusions" in the usual sense were involved. This project was not an experiment; it was an effort to complete an important work which had already been brought near to conclusion.

Some important implications are clear, and will be made specific when the book is published. Scholars have been but little aware of interdisciplinary studies, and they should become more aware of these areas as areas. For example, consider literature and education, in which, obviously, many revealing studies can and should be made. There is no general book on the relationships between education and literature, for British literature, for American literature, or apparently for any major subdivision of literature in English or for any other language. No study exists for the relationships between literature and education in Victorian times, in modern times, in the 18th century, or again, so far as we discovered, for any major period. Some work there has been; for example, Shakespeare has occasioned much study, including an excellent examination of Shakespeare's supposed schooling. This volume (T. W. Baldwin, William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke) reveals much concerning relationships between writers and schools in the English Renaissance, but only incidentally. Books on ideas (for example, Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass) may reveal relationships between learning and literature, but in general, little basic research has been done calculated to reveal relationships between disciplines, and the books that

should assemble the results of such researches have not been written, or apparently even conceived.

Certain supplemental works are obvious. Christy recognized their need, but wisely realizing that not everything could be incorporated in any one volume he rejected this material by definition. The Guide includes studies of influences from abroad on British and American literature, but no studies of the influences of British and American literatures abroad. Bibliographies of influences to and from other English-speaking areas are obviously desirable, and similar studies should be made for Latin American countries. Similar studies are lacking for much of Europe and Asia, but scholars in those areas are becoming scatteringly aware of the need for comparative studies.

The greatest weakness in the Guide appears in cross-disciplinary studies outside the English-speaking and Western-European areas, where great areas and long stretches of time combine with a paucity of research employing modern concepts. Comparative studies are rare, and are not usually catalogued in such a way that they can be readily identified; hence, local experts are imperative, but scholars in these areas are few; and scholars who can write in widely-read languages are fewer still. Thus, assembling anything like an adequate staff for Asia and Africa has been impossible with the time and money available. The editors have given special attention to these areas; they presumably have missed few if any important works, and where no good works were found they entered the best that appeared, but many of these bibliographies remain mainly notable for the gaps they reveal.

SUMMARY

The project was to bring to publishable state a cooperative critical bibliography of works important for broad comparative studies starting from the point of view of an English-speaking American, but useful throughout the world. This bibliography had been begun a quarter of a centruy ago, had engaged the researches of more than a hundred scholars and editors, and had resulted in a very important scholarly and research tool but the manuscript had become out of date when supposedly firm publishing arrangements broke down. With the funds provided through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare the updating of the manuscript and the revision of the first draft has been essentially completed,

so that the revised and enlarged manuscript is now being prepared for the publisher. The anticipated volume will be an indispensable reference tool, will further comparative studies, especially those involving writings in English and most particularly those involving American studies, and will become a pioneer work in the study of interdisciplinary studies involving literature. The book will also point the way to much research that is badly needed but has not yet been attempted.